

Night and Fog *in Japan: Fifty Years On*

On 12 October, 1960, the day the socialist politician Asanuma Inejr? (1898-1960) was assassinated by a right-wing fanatic, ?shima Nagisa's film *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no yoru to kiri*) was withdrawn from cinemas after screening for only four days. A Japanese film critic writing at the time, Aochi (1961), speculates that the withdrawal of the film was not, as reported, due to low box office takings but for political reasons. There was a rumour that the Head of the Sh?chiku Studios, ?tani Hiroshi, had been approached by the cabinet secretary with a request to withdraw the film from public screenings. Why, Aochi and ?shima both questioned, if it was a matter of box office takings, did the Studio subsequently refuse to re-release the film to student circles?

As a direct result of the controversy regarding the withdrawal of the film, *Night and Fog in Japan* was the last film ?shima would make from within the studio system. In this paper, I shall argue that *Night and Fog in Japan* is a pivotal film, in that, it not only marked ?shima's departure from Sh?chiku, but that in terms of its subject matter and visual-style it also marked the beginnings of Japan's *avant-garde* film movement which reached an apotheosis in the mid to late-1960s and early-1970s with such classics as *Death by Hanging* (*K?shikei* ?shima 1968), *Boy* (*Sh?nen* ?shima 1969) *Ceremonies* (*Gishiki* ?shima 1971), *A Man Vanishes* (*Ningen j?hatsu* Imamura 1967), *Eros + Massacre* (*Erosu + gyakusatsu* Yoshida 1970), *Martial Law* (*Kaigenrei* Yoshida 1973) *Human Bullet* (*Nikudan* Okamoto 1968) and *Pitfall* (*Otoshi ana* Teshigawara 1962) to name but a few. The French term, *nouvelle vague*, had already been employed as a marketing strategy by Sh?chiku to distinguish its 'youth films' from the popular Nikkatsu Studio's *taiy?zoku* (sun-tribe) films, however, it was after the controversy surrounding *Night and Fog in Japan* that a truly independent *avant-garde* movement emerged in the 1960s. Thus 2010, fifty years since the aborted release of *Night and Fog in Japan*, would seem an appropriate historical juncture to reassess this landmark film and to reconsider the institutional links between this nascent movement and the founding, in 1962, of the independent film distribution company Japanese Art Theatre Guild (ATG).

While there was no formal manifesto for this movement and the various key filmmakers of the period experimented with very different conceptions of visual-style, it is possible to identify an ethical position that motivated many of these filmmakers: a generational consciousness based on political opposition that was intimately linked to the student movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and shared experiences as Japan's first generation of post-war filmmakers artistically stifled by a monopolistic and hierarchal commercial studio system that had emerged reinvigorated in the wake of the 'red purges' of the late-1940s. Born around 1930, their youth was dominated by the final stages of the war, the deprivations of defeat, and the US-led occupation, they thus formed part of what became known colloquially as the 'generation of the burnt out ruins' (*yakeatoha*). ATG formed an industry-based focal point around which this nascent *avant-garde* converged. ATG began operations as an 'art house' distribution company specializing in the importation of films from Europe. Simultaneously launching the journal *Art Theatre*, ATG became the cinephile centre of Japanese cultural life and the arbiter of a 'taste' linked specifically to a new post-war,

politically conscious, intellectual elite. By the mid-1960s the company had expanded into jointly funding local productions with filmmakers, many of whom would collectively become known as Japan's *avant-garde* - Ōshima Nagisa (1932-), Teshigawara Hiroshi (1927-), Imamura Shōhei (1926-), Yoshida Yoshishige (1932-), and Hani Susumu (1928-). However, before discussing the institutional significance of ATG, I shall first consider the political threat posed by *Night and Fog in Japan* that warranted such an unprecedented response from conservative political forces both within the government and the Shōchiku Studio.

Within western commentaries there is a variety of opinion regarding Ōshima's last film of 1960 that in its title, *Night and Fog in Japan*, echoes Alain Resnais's 1955 iconic documentary *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et Brouillard*). Maureen Turim, links the two films through visual-style:

Resnais's film uses long takes, extended travelling shots of the concentration camp, and extensive voice-over to situate philosophically the Holocaust within memory. In montage, documentary images of the atrocities confront the viewer with the evidence of what seems unimaginable. Ōshima's film has entirely different subject matter; the link seems to be more in the stylistic daring and the visual and voiced confrontational style Resnais brought to the film essay (Turim: 1998:52-53).

David Desser, by contrast, links the narrative theme of the two films to a sense of 'betrayal' when he states:

If it strikes the Western observer as extreme to compare the horror of the Nazi extermination camps with the feeling of having been betrayed by the Old Left, it may be that at bottom it is the sense of betrayal that is being highlighted in both films. Implicit in Resnais's films is the utter failure of European society which could give rise to such monstrous crimes; explicit in Ōshima's film is the utter failure of liberal-humanism and communism to bring any substantial changes to Japan, failure to prevent the return of feudalistic values and the failure to prevent the return of imperialistic aims (Desser 1988:30-31).

Desser comes close in his analysis, as a sense of 'betrayal' is central to the thematic concerns of both films, however, through visual-style Ōshima also challenges mainstream representations of history and discursively re-positions a political question that arose out of the war crimes trials and which haunted much of post-defeat society, that of individual accountability and social obligation[i] as expressed in the *shutaisei* debates of the post-defeat decade. Noël Burch describes it in the following terms, 'what is the relationship between *me* and the struggle *out there*?' Burch elaborates:

[Ōshima] was led to conceptualize, from his own political experience and that of his peer group, a dialectical relationship between mass consciousness and 'true' subjectivity. It is dialectical insofar as the 'truth' of this subjectivity stems from an awareness that the individual derives his status from the social context (Burch: 1979:327) [ii].

Within the narrative context of Ōshima's *Night and Fog in Japan*, or as a more literal rendering of the title as *Japan's Night and Fog* alludes through its echoes of Resnais's film, the relationship between the individual and the wider group, or institution, is played out in a

discursive struggle to reposition history through memory (depicted through stylized flashbacks) within the narrative context of a debate between the Old and the New Left. In the course of this debate, *Night and Fog in Japan* exposes the homogenizing and totalizing (*s?katsu*) pressures the institution, in this case the Communist Party, brings to bear on the individual in an attempt to make him or her conform. As ?shima states, ‘I thought at the time [of filming] the main fault was with the central faction of the Communist Party, now I think it is in communism itself’ (?shima 1993:265)[iii]. The underlying judgement of the film being, that immoral acts are committed in a group situation where loyalty to one’s fellows is set apart as the ultimate virtue. In the face of monolithic opposition (as in wartime and violent political struggles), this overriding necessity for unity distorts the very values, such as, the autonomy of the individual contained within political concepts of democracy and freedom, that the group espouses.

In the post-defeat era, this theme of the individual versus the group had a long pedigree in mainstream cinema, particularly, in the case of films dealing with issues of war crimes which are often portrayed through themes of ‘victimization’. Linked to the critique of these films is the notion of accountability. If all Japanese were victims of their politicians and military leaders, they are absolved from accountability. Mainstream films had utilized this dialectical theme of the individual versus the group to explain both atrocities carried out by individuals during the war, *I Want to be Reborn a Shellfish* (*Watashi wa kai ni naritai* Hashimoto 1959), and to condemn the Japanese wartime military institutions which, during the fifteen years of war, had increasingly demanded unquestioning loyalty and self-sacrifice – *The Pacific War and the International Tribunal* (*Dait?a Sens? to Kokusai Saiban* Komori 1959).

As I have argued elsewhere [iv], the ‘victimization’ theme, narrativized through the ‘tragic hero’ of the war-retro genre of commercial cinema, provided a textually mediated paradigm through which individuals could reconcile and interpolate their personal experiences of war and defeat coming to something like a ‘collective’ understanding of the trauma of the past. The success of this genre as an explanatory paradigm rests on a dissolution of the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ in the creation of meaning. As Hayden White, following Fredric Jameson in another context argues, the seamless co-mingling of the ‘reality’ of historical events with the imaginary of fiction in docu-dramas and historical meta-fiction infers that: ‘Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary – realistically imaginary and imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function of the images of events is etiolated’ (White 1996:19). This, White argues, is one of the consequences of the ‘holocaustal events’ that have come to define the history of the twentieth century; ‘the two World Wars, the Great Depression, a growth in world population hitherto unimaginable, poverty and hunger on a scale never before experienced, pollution of the ecosphere by nuclear explosion and indiscriminate disposal of contaminates, programs of genocide undertaken by societies utilizing scientific technology and rationalized procedures of governance and warfare’ (White 1996:20). These historical events are of such enormity that they challenged nineteenth-century conceptions of the historian’s role as recorder of ‘fact’ through the apportionment of human agency. Power in the twentieth century, as Foucault has demonstrated, is not identifiably contained within one locus, but is multifarious. Therefore, the history of ‘events’ is written not in terms of ‘facts’, but in

terms of ‘meanings’ and it is this search for stability in meaning which necessitates the formations of ‘collective memory’ as a social basis to ameliorate the effects of trauma on the collective imagination.

John Orr in his study *The Victim as Hero* has discovered evidence to the effect that the development of the ‘victimization’ theme formed part of, and was encouraged by Allied policy. A special intelligence report by the US Morale Analysis Division recommended in June 1945 that propaganda should give the average Japanese person hope in defeat.

While making it perfectly clear to the Japanese that we are going to eliminate the militarists because they went to war with us, we may point out how the militarists have harmed Japanese and we may make it clear that we have no intention of punishing the Japanese people once the *militarists are overthrown. In this manner, the militarists may effectively be used as a scapegoat*, with the double result of weakening their hold and leading other people to feel there is something to hope for in surrender (quoted in Orr 2001:17 emphasis added by Orr).

Orr assesses this policy in the following terms:

Apart from its obvious effectiveness in creating visceral antiwar sentiment, war victim consciousness was promoted by Allied psychological warfare agents and Occupation authorities to encourage alienation from the wartime state and its military – and, after the conservative return to power, by left-wing activists to condemn in a coded way the postwar state and its Cold War US security alliance (Orr 2001:7).

Thus according to Orr’s assessment both the Left and the Right of politics had a vested interest in appropriating ‘victimization’ as an explanatory paradigm. Coded within the ‘tragic hero’ narrative which had, as Ivan Morris in *The Nobility of Failure* (1980) explains, dominated traditional Japanese storytelling genres, the war-retro genre of the commercial cinema, from the late-1950s on, re-positioned the trauma of war, defeat and occupation from within post-war paradigms of sacrifice and re-building the nation. The backlash against the ‘victor’s justice’ and ‘victimization’ narratives discussed by Gavin McCormack in his essay ‘The Japanese Movement to “Correct” History’ in relation to the publication of Fujioka Nobukatsu’s book *History Not Taught in Textbooks* (*Ky?kasho ga oshienai rekishi*) in 1996, forms part of the contemporary discourse to re-appropriate the ‘meaning’ of the past from within Japanese and not foreign agendas.

Resnais’s *Night and Fog*, as one Japanese critic writing in the film journal *Record* (*Kiroku*) in 1961 argues, forces the viewer to acknowledge his or her complacency by confronting audiences with the question, ‘We, who are trying to enjoy a brief period of peace... We have no intention of looking at our surroundings. We put on an air of having forgotten...’ (Kimura 1961:36). *Night and Fog in Japan* re-appropriates this thematic motif and utilizes it to question the role of the individual working within the monolithic totalizing influences of the Japanese Communist Party and the militant student groups, all of which were pitted against the conservative US backed post-war Japanese government at the time of the anti-treaty struggles of the early-1950s and the later anti-renewal struggles of the late-1950s. As such, the film is structured both around generational conflicts between the Old Left and the New Left and between multiple levels of narrated time. Within both generations, it is the disappearance of a colleague

that provides the narrative trigger through which the group argues out, what Burch correctly identifies as the ‘dialectical relationship between mass consciousness and “true” subjectivity’. With regard to the Old Left, the narrative context reverts through flashbacks to the time a suspected spy was being held in the students’ dormitory. In terms of the contemporary late-1950s student movement, the New Left, this same theme is played out around the disappearance of a student, Kitami, after the fateful night of 15 July 1960 when a female student from Tokyo University died during the violent anti-renewal demonstration outside the Diet.

The blue tones and deep penetrating fog that characterizes the *mise-en-scène* of ?shima’s *Night and Fog in Japan* evokes the claustrophobic nature of the staged wedding ceremony. The use of the long-take, or as ?shima describes it, ‘one-scene one-cut’ technique, was designed to heighten the physicality of the tension of what is already a tense narrative situation – a wedding ceremony where opposing political factions face each other off across the divide between the groom’s and bride’s guests. As ?shima explains:

A twofold tension is compelled in the actors and the staff. Compelling tension in this way is my dramaturgy (*doramatsurujii*). I compel tension in everyone. It is fine to compel tension in one person, but to compel tension in a great number of people, to increase it by ten-fold, that kind of tension is, I think, what life (*seimei*) is about (?shima 1993:296).

?shima explains that the ‘one-scene one-cut’ technique, shunned by the major studios, because it left limited room for post-production alterations and corrections in the editing room, puts greater pressure on the actors to perform at their peak during the filming, and also similarly, forces the technical staff to minimize errors during filming. The maintenance of this level of ‘tension’ on the set, ?shima suggests, permeated the narrative with a heightened level of ‘tension’ that would not have been possible had, for example, montage techniques been applied.

Tayama reviewing Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* in a 1961 article titled ‘Alain Resnais’s Distrust of Humanity, *Night and Fog*’ (*Alain Resnais no ningen fushin*) argues, that the central question of the film is, are the people who ran the camps so different from us? He continues, Resnais ‘does not just criticize Nazism. The acts of cruelty revealed were carried out by people who, ultimately, are the same as us (*ware ware to onaji kao o shite*). It is here, in the fact that people are like this, that Resnais’s distrust lies’ (Tayama: 1961:64). Furthermore, as the critic writing in *Record* argues, the alternation between the past and present, visualized through the alternation between colour and black and white, forces the viewer to confront questions of accountability, Resnais ‘does not demand that we recognize the historical truth of the past. What he demands, is that we should recognize the present time, and confront the question of responsibility that each one of us living in the present bears’ (Kimura 1961:36).

Equally, this question is raised in ?shima’s *Night and Fog in Japan*. ?shima implies that in contemporary 1950s and 1960s Japan it is all happening again, the individual is being subsumed into the institution and being forced to compromise his/her ethical position, under the auspices of American-led imperial ambition on the one hand, and the betrayals of the Stalinist Old Left on the other. As Misako states in her interrogation of the suspected spy, ‘Spy, as a Japanese, don’t you understand who the enemy of Japan is, don’t you understand that Japan is being sold out by America (*Nihon o amerika ni utteru*)?’ The American connection is reinforced through references

to the Uchinada Incident, the first major public protest movement against the establishment of American military bases in Japan. The protest movement continued through 1952 and 1953 when the practice firing range was finally opened. It was used to train US troops for their tours of duty on the Korean peninsula.

The film critic Aochi, writing in *Film Art*, was particularly moved by the final scene of *Night and Fog in Japan*, which he concludes resolves nothing:

The film does not provide a solution, the Japanese Communist Party, the so called Trotskyites of Zengakuren, and the sceptical humanists are on one hand affirmed and on the other denied. Then in the final scene of *Night and Fog in Japan*, the endless speech made by the Party official continues and is enveloped in the deep white fog that lies between the trees. This formal speech calling in an orthodox manner for a unity on the battle fronts of peace and democracy, is possibly theoretically correct, but comes out as empty and lacking in persuasion deepening with the fog that lies between the trees. This final scene is emblematic of the weakness of Japan's reformist resolve and left one with an unbearable impression (Aochi 1961:24).

The political force and efficacy of the film in attacking Japanese society and confronting contemporary 1960's political institutions can be measured in the urgency with which the film was withdrawn from cinemas only four days after its release on the day, 12 October, the socialist politician Asanuma Inejirō (1898-1960) was assassinated [v]. In terms of Japanese film critics, they were sharply divided between those who regarded the film as a complete failure and those, such as Aochi, who were at pains to refute such criticism. Aochi argues that the reception of the film reflected generational differences as those who accused the film of being difficult to understand did not share Ōshima's background.

Commenting on Ōshima's films of 1960, Mochizuki also writing in the journal *Film Art* at this time, suggests that they brought to the screen contemporary problems that arose out of a combination of poverty and the Americanization of Japanese society and 'morals' (*moraru*). He continues, stating that out of these processes many Japanese people experienced a sense of alienation (*sogai ishiki*) similar to that experienced in Europe in the nineteenth century with the rise of industrial capitalism. This was particularly true of the Anpo generation. Many of whom were criminalized for their participation in the struggles and, like Ōshima himself, found it difficult to gain employment in their chosen field. To support this line of argument Aochi quotes from an interview with Ōshima published in the women's magazine *Fujin Kōron*:

I entered the Law Department of Kyoto University in April 1950. That was the year of the outbreak of the Korean War and the year of the Red Purge. It was the year when the violent student movement opposing the Red Purge rose high along with the first vanguard for the protection of democracy. While harbouring some discontent about tactics, I naturally drew close to the student movement (Ōshima quoted in Aochi 1961:26).

Aochi suggests that for these reasons, Ōshima, like many of his generation, altered their career patterns in response to the politics of the times and that it was this generation and class of intellectuals who could most clearly identify with and understand the debate central to *Night and*

Fog in Japan.

Desser makes the point that it might be difficult for western audiences of *Night and Fog in Japan* to equate the horror of the Jewish Holocaust, as depicted in Resnais's film, with the politics of post-war Japan. However, from within the ethical debate of the autonomy of the individual (*shutaisei-ron*) central to the philosophical basis of participatory democracy, policies implemented at this time as a response to US demands encouraged a deep fear that Japan was sinking back into a pre-war military-led government system. As Oguma argues, the 1960 Anpo struggle was far more significant than just an opposition to the US. It was linked to what many now saw as a revisionism aimed at returning Japan to its pre-war and wartime conservatism. This feeling was palpable as the then Prime Minister, Kishi Nobusuke, was a re-instated A-class war criminal who was ultimately forced from office due to public protest over the Treaty revision and replaced by Ikeda Hayato in 1960 (Oguma 2005:503).

Public criticism centred on Japan's role in the American *imperium* as a seeming colony, not unlike that of the Philippines, while public debate centred on the related questions of Japan's future position in the international community as an unarmed neutral nation, and the protection of the Peace Constitution (Oguma 2005). For, people questioned, how desirable is a government that has to rely on coercion to govern? The Red Purges first implemented in the late-1940s impacted on the film industry splitting the Toho Studios in half; the subsequent purge in 1950, resulted in 1171 government employees with left-wing connections losing their jobs. The implementation of the Anti-Subversive Activities Law (*Hakai Katsudō Bōshihō* known as the *Habōhō*) in July 1952, preceded by the forcing of the US-Japan Joint Security Treaty through the Diet in 1951 by locking out opposition politicians during the voting, despite massive public opposition, all these actions reinforced the view that opposition to US-led policy would not be tolerated. Japan's logistic support for US troop involvement in the Korean War, which the then conservative Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru is reported as saying at a meeting of the Party was 'heaven sent' as special procurements for the American military would revive the flagging Japanese economy after the recession caused by the implementation of the Dodge austerity plan in 1949 (Oguma 2005), combined with the re-establishment of a Japanese military capability with the euphemistically called, Security Forces, in 1950 (and their expansion in 1952, and 1954), created a very real sense that Japanese society was once again being subsumed within a military-industrial complex with imperial ambitions. Only this time it was being externally, rather than internally orchestrated. To return to Desser's point, from this context of post-war Japanese politics driven by US military policy and the often violent political struggle to assert national autonomy through the democratic right of protest and free elections, it is not so difficult to equate the betrayal of humanity in Resnais's film and the betrayal of the promises of democracy and the failure of the Left to implement reforms in Ōshima's film.

In less than two years after *Night and Fog in Japan* was withdrawn, ATG was formed becoming, in the first instance, one of the principal vehicles through which the ideal of an 'aesthetics of taste' was imported from Europe into Japan, before becoming an institutional mechanism through which some of Japan's most politically radical films were made – *Eros + Massacre*, *Death by Hanging*, *Human Bullet* and *Ceremonies*. In an article published in the

Japanese journal *Film Art (Eiga Geijutsu)* in January 1962 to announce the inauguration of the company, one of the primary instigators, Kawakita Kashiko, sets out its principal aims. It is clear from this article that, after extensive travels in Europe and the US, she identified a perceived need to introduce an alternative 'art house' cinema into Japan to counter what was inherently understood to be an inferior commercial cinema controlled by the five major studios, Shochiku, Nikkatsu, Toei, Daiei and Toho. The language used in the article to define the types of films to be selected by ATG, 'superior films' (*yoshieiga*) and the emphasis on the 'non-commercial' (*hishogyoshugi*), clearly represents an attempt to locate ATG within the 'high' art classification of cultural 'taste' and is evidenced by the first film selected for release in April 1962, the Polish film *Mother Joan of the Angels (Matka Joanna od Aniolow)* directed by Jerzy Kawalerowicz 1961. The establishment of an 'aesthetics of taste' as a remit for ATG extended to Kawakita's description of the foreign 'art house' cinemas she visited, and which were to be emulated in the décor and ambience of the ATG cinemas. '[T]here are many art house cinemas that seat less than five hundred. The reason for this is that they are not aiming at the masses, their objective is to screen mainly foreign, artistic [*geijustuteki*] films' (Kawakita 1962:47).

The Kawakita family had a long association with European cinema dating back to the early-1930s when Kawakita Nagamasa ran the Towa Shoji film importation and distribution company which specialized in European, particularly German, films. Kawakita Nagamasa took over this role as principal European film importer from Mori Iwao. Continuing this family connection Mori Iwao, who was to be reinstated in the early-1950s as head of the Toho Studios, went on to become the principal backer of the ATG, with a sixty-percent share holding.

On an industry level, Kawakita Kashiko suggests that audiences had become tired of Hollywood-style epic productions (here she cites *Ben Hur* 1959) and were seeking alternatives. Equally, the increase in interest in international film festivals also helped engender a new sense of internationalization (globalization in contemporary parlance). ATG was to be Japan's contribution to this trend and part of the project, as far as Kawakita Kashiko was concerned, was to educate Japanese audiences. In the article, Kawakita lists an extensive fourteen point manifesto which alludes to this educational role of the company. Through a discussion of the spacing and number of seats in theatres, she incorporates a discussion of cinema etiquette making it clear that spectators will be discouraged from entering a screening once the programme had begun and that standing during screenings would not be permitted. She continues to elaborate on the educational role of the enterprise when she announces the inauguration of the journal, *Art Theatre*, and that exhibitions were to be held in theatre lobbies. In all these points the cinemas of the 'commercial' chains form the negative binary against which ATG theatres are defined. Where 'commercial' cinemas aim to maximize seating, the main Tokyo, Shinjuku ATG venue was re-modelled and the seating capacity reduced from six hundred to four hundred seats. The rules governing when a person may enter the cinema and the prohibition on standing were all in opposition to the big 'commercial' cinemas which permitted standing in the aisles and a rush for seats at the programme change over. In terms of films to be screened, point six simply states 'Publicized films (*kokueiga*) will not be screened' (Kawakita 1962:49).

It is clear from Kawakita's article that, contained within the ethos of the company, was an

agenda linked to the promotion of a specific ‘aesthetics of taste’ predicated on a disavowal of the economic imperative that drove the ‘commercial’ cinema. Symbolic, and not economic capital, was to ostensibly define the success of ATG. Ultimately this anti-commercial ethos came to define a visual-style, built around, what I refer to as an ‘aesthetics of economy’ predicated on the concept of the film director as *auteur* and it was this ‘aesthetics of economy’ that provided a determining framework that stylistically links many of the principal productions of Japan’s 1960s *avant-garde* filmmakers – artistic autonomy of the filmmaker, location filming, the predominant use of black and white film stock, the employment of theatre as distinct from cinema actors and film scores composed by musicians from the experimental classical traditions. There is, however, an inherent contradiction within this project as ATG, despite its disavowal of the economic, did function as an economically viable company, rapidly expanding from distribution into financing independent film production. Financially underpinned by the Tōhō Studios, one of Japan’s five major commercial studios, its formation also represented an acknowledgement of the changing economic realities of the Japanese market and was clearly designed to tap into a new audience – a university educated, politically conscious, middle-class elite. With its main cinema located in the heart of one of Tokyo’s largest entertainment districts, Shinjuku, it easily tapped into this aspiring intellectual youth market. In the second half of the 1960s, Shinjuku was the centre of alternative live-theatre and many *avant-garde* actors, directors and musicians became involved in collaborative filmmaking ventures through ATG – the actor turned director Terayama Shōji (1935-1983) and the composer Takemitsu Tōru (1930-1996) are just two examples. Shinjuku was also the geographical centre of much student protest.

Nineteen fifty-eight represented the height of box-office takings in Japan after which the major studios began to experience a steady and irreversible decline. As the studios reduced their production staff base, they increasingly sought independent films to fill the booking schedules for their cinema chains. Therefore, despite walking out of the Shōchiku Studios in 1960 after the acrimonious withdrawal from cinemas of *Night and Fog in Japan*, Ōshima was able to release first *Pleasures of the Flesh (Etsuraku)* in 1965, *Violence at Noon (Hakuchō no tsuma)* in 1966, *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide (Muri shinjō Nihon no natsu)* in 1967, and *The Three Resurrected Drunkards (Kaete kita yopparai)* in 1968, through the Shōchiku cinema chain. Reportedly, after the closure of the Kyoto production studios, the Shōchiku Ōfuna [Tokyo] Studios reduced their production rate from four films a month to two-point-five films, the balance being made up through independent films.

These changes in industry demographics and the forming of ATG opened the way for the development of a cinema of opposition and ensured that films such as *Night and Fog in Japan* would no longer be withdrawn from cinemas at the behest of government bureaucrats. Katori Shunsuke, one of the more recent analysts of Imamura Shōhei’s *oeuvre* summarizes the centrality of this political consciousness to the *avant-garde* movement when he states:

A characteristic of this generation is a way of looking at things ‘relatively’ (*shōtaiteki*), that is they do not believe in anything absolutely. As children, they were boys and girls of militarism and were educated to sacrifice one’s life in the service of the country. And after defeat which was unprecedented, society’s values changed one hundred and eighty

degrees. Yesterday's 'militarism' changed to 'democracy', what had been 'good' until yesterday became 'bad' and the reverse, what was 'bad' changed to 'good' (Katori: 2004:97).

Thus the holocaustal events of the twentieth century betrayed the certitudes of the pre-modern world. In terms of representation, it was no longer possible to merely present the historical event as an event. Kurosawa in *Rashomon* (and before him Akutagawa Ryunosuke [1892-1927] upon whose novellas the film was based) recognizes this fact and presents a murder and rape as a series of representations of thoughts about the event rather than the factual presentation of the crime itself. This then is what Husserl in *Ideas* defines as a phenomenological approach and it is this, in Japanese films of the 1960s and early-1970s, that underlies, at the level of visual-style, the distinction between the *avant-garde* and mainstream studio productions. Husserl's definition rests on the distinction between the 'natural' and the phenomenological standpoint as Mautner explains:

The former is the ordinary everyday viewpoint and the ordinary stance of the natural sciences, describing things and the state-of-affairs. The latter is the special viewpoint achieved by the phenomenologist who focuses not on things but on our consciousness of things (Mautner 2000:260).

In terms of Japan's fifteen year war and the occupation, the alternative to a phenomenological representation of historical events was a form of cultural inversion, a timeless project of forgetting in myth. In Japanese mainstream cinema from the mid-1950s, this manifests in a return to the 'tragic hero' paradigm of historiography and the traditional theatre through themes of 'victimization'. The 'tragic hero' archetype not only framed suffering within localized historical precedents, it also facilitated a project of forgetting; 'Japan's conception of the postwar which negates continuity with the past, made it possible for Japan not to face seriously the aftermath of its own imperialist violence in the former colonies and occupied territories' (Iwabuchi 2002:10). White drawing on Jameson in another context similarly concludes that;

the modernist de-realization of the event amounts to a rejection of the historicity of all events and that this is what throws the modernist sensibility open to on the one hand the attractions of myth...[the tragic hero], or on the other hand the extravagances of melodrama... In the former case, the meaning of otherwise unimaginable events is seen to reside in their resemblance to *timeless* archetypal stories... In the latter case, meaning is rendered spectral, seeming to consist solely in the *spatial* dispersion of the phenomena that had originally seemed to have converged only in order to indicate the occurrence of an event (White 1996:26-27).

It was these conventions of the mainstream commercial cinema that ?shima, fifty years ago, challenged with *Night and Fog in Japan* and would shatter in his joint productions with ATG *Death by Hanging*, *Boy*, and *Ceremonies*.

[i] Onuma (1993), in his book on the Tokyo War Crimes Trial and war responsibility, argues that the trial raised the question of the individual's moral responsibility of 'conscientious refusal' versus the individual's social duty to follow the directions of his/her government representatives. This question in its relation to mainstream cinema is taken up in greater detail in *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* and *A New History of Japanese Cinema*.

[ii] ?shima (1993) rejects the term 'dialectic' (benshy?h?), which he defines as 'the collision of two different opinions' (futatsu no kotonaru iken ga butsukaru), to describe the structure of the film. However, Burch's use of the term is linked to a dialectic struggle between the individual and the institution.

[iii] All translations from the Japanese are my own.

[iv] See *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema: Towards a Political Reading of the Tragic Hero*.

[v] Asanuma Inejir? was a Socialist politician who in 1959 denounced US imperialism as the principal threat to Japan and China. In 1960 he was stabbed by a right-wing fanatic at a political rally. His death was a very public event being caught by TV cameras filming the rally.